THE IMPACT OF DIVERGENT SPACE STANDARDS SYSTEMS*

M. S. REID
JET Propulsion LABORATORY, CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, USA

Y. EL GAMMAL
CENTRE NATIONAL d'ETUDES SPATIALES, PARIS, FRANCE, AND CHAIRMAN, TECHNICAL PANEL, EUROPEAN COOPERATION FOR SPACE STANDARDIZATION

ABSTRACT

The United States has always had a decentralized system of standards. There is no government agency in which authority is centralized for the representation of U.S. interests in international organizations, or for control of the generation or maintenance of standards. This responsibility is accepted by volunteers from industry, government agencies, and other organizations, and is usually implemented through professional societies and trade organizations,

The only centralized, government supported standards activity in the U.S. has been the system of military standards (MIL.STDS.) where standards for military purposes were generated and maintained by the Department of Defense. MIL.STDS. have, of course, been used by industry and others for their own purposes. In most other countries representation in the international arena is provided by government agencies per se, or by entities authorized by the government for this purpose.

At exactly the same time that the U.S. is becoming more decentralized by the withdrawal of the Department of Defense from almost all standards activities, Western Europe is aggressively pursuing increased centralization, at least for space standards. The European Cooperation for Space Standardization (ECSS) has been recently established to develop a coherent, single set of user-friendly standards for use in all European space activities. It is significant that the ECSS has agreement and cooperation by all the major space agencies in Europe as well as prime and sub-contracting industries across several countries, and the support, both financial and political, of the European Union.

This paper compares the divergent methods of space standardization for the U.S. and Europe and evaluates the impact on future cooperative space endeavors. It proposes some concepts for avoiding problems and misunderstandings and suggests how the decentralized U.S. system could work felicitously with the ECSS.

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